

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ATHENS 7889

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MPOL GR US

SUBJECT: US NAVY SHIP VISIT TO ELEFSIS PIER

SUMMARY: INITIAL USN SHIP VISIT TO ELEFSIS PIER SINCE
TERMINATION OF HOMEPORTING, AND FIRST SUCH VISIT
SINCE JULY 1974, OCCURRED WITHOUT INCIDENT. PRESS
ACCOUNTS WERE RELATIVELY FACTUAL AND RESTRAINED, LARGELY
AS A RESULT OF A GOG STATEMENT EXPLAINING THE VISIT.
END SUMMARY.

1. US NAVY REQUESTS FOR HN CLEARANCE OF SHIP VISITS TO
ATHENS UTILIZING ELEFSIS PIER DURING MONTH OF OCTOBER AS
AGREED TO BY GOG IN AUGUST, WERE APPROVED IN LATE
SEPTEMBER. PARALLEL REQUEST THROUGH FONOFF FOR SINGLE
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SHIP VISIT TO RHODES WAS REJECTED, ALTHOUGH HN AND FONOFF

INDICATED SHIP SLATED TO VISIT RHODES MIGHT ALSO VISIT ELEFSIS. TOTAL OF FIVE RATHER THAN FOUR SHIPS WAS THEN SCHEDULED TO USE ELEFSIS PIER IN OCTOBER.

2. INITIAL VISITING SHIP, USS MITSCHER DDG-35, TIED UP AT ELEFSIS PIER OCTOBER 11. THIS WAS FIRST SHIP TO UTILIZE PIER SINCE LAST UNIT OF HOMEPORTED DESTROYER SQUADRON DEPARTD ELEFSIS JULY 30 AND FIRST SHIP VISIT WITH SHORE LEAVE IN GREECE SINCE EARLY JULY 1974. VISIT LASTED UNTIL AFTERNOON OF OCTOBER 14 AND NEXT VISITOR, USS RICKETTS DDG-5, ARRIVED MORNING OF SAME DAY, WITH BRIEF OVERLAP CALCULATED TO ENABLE ARRIVING SHIP TO BENEFIT FROM EXPERIENCE OF ITS PREDECESSOR. BEHAVIOR OF CREW SEEMED EXEMPLARY, REFLECTING COMMAND INTEREST AS WELL AS THROUGH ADVANCE BRIEFING PROVIDED BY EMBASSY NAVAL ATTACHE PERSONNEL, NAVEUR AND OTHERS.

3. COINCIDENTALLY, NBC TELEVISION TEAM HEADED BY GARRICK UTLEY WAS IN ATHENS OCTOBER 12-14. UPON LEARNING OF PRESENCE OF VISITING SIXTH FLEET UNIT, NBC TEAM SOUGHT TO FILM PIER AND SHIP, AND PERMISSION WAS GIVEN TO DO SO ONLY FROM WITHIN PIER COMPOUND WALLS. TEAM ARRIVED OCTOBER 14 AND FILMED USS MITSCHER AND USS RICKETTS, AS WELL AS SPEAKING WITH CREW MEMBERS IN PIER HEAD SNACKBAR. THIS COVERAGE SPOSEDLY TO BE USED ONLY IN NBC THREE-HOUR SPECIAL ON US FOREIGN POLICY WHICH EMBASSY UNDERSTANDS TO BE SHOWN IN JANUARY 1976 (ATHENS 7717 AND STATE 239739-NOTAL).

4. MOST ATHENS PRESS NOTED PRESENCE OF USS MITSCHER INCLUDING FRONT PAGE PHOTOGRAPH AND STORY IN MOST CASES. SEVERAL ACCOUNTS OF THE SHIP'S VISIT WERE FAIRLY FACTUAL AND STRAIGHTFORWARD; OTHERS, PRIMARILY IN THE COMMUNIST AND LEFTIST PAPERS, WERE CRITICAL. CLEARLY, HOWEVER, THE GOVERNMENT'S STATEMENT ON THE VISIT SERVED TO TAKE THE WIND OUT OF ANY GENERAL PRESS ATTACK, WITH MOST PAPERS STRESSING THAT VISITS BY SIXTH FLEET SHIPS WOULD END WITH 1975.

5. ALL PAPERS ON OCTOBER 13 AND 14 CARRIED GOG STATEMENT
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ABOUT THE VISIT, WHICH READS AS FOLLOWS: QUOTE ASKED ABOUT THE AMERICAN WARSHIP IN ELEFSIS, A "COMPETENT SOURCE" MADE THE FOLLOWING CLARIFICATION: 'DURING THE GREEK-AMERICAN NEGOTIATIONS IN WHICH THE TERMINATION OF HOME-PORTING BY SHIPS OF THE SIXTH FLEET AT ELEFSIS WAS DECIDED, IT WAS AGREED THAT UNTIL THE END OF THE YEAR WARSHIPS COULD PUT INTO (ELEFSIS) PORT ONE AT A TIME AND FOR A PERIOD OF TWO TO FOUR DAYS. THE OLD AGREEMENT

ENVISAGED THE PERMANENT HOMEPORTING OF SIX SHIPS. WITH
THE END OF 1975, NO SHIPS OF THE AMERICAN SIXTH FLEET
WILL ENTER THE PORT OF ELEFSIS." UNQUOTE

6. WHILE LAST SENTENCE OF RESPONSE BY "COMPE-
TENT SOURCE" MIGHT SEEM TO FORECLOSE POSSIBILITY OF VISITS
BEYOND DECEMBER 1975, DEPARTMENT WILL RECALL THAT
GOG HAS UNDERTAKEN TO REVIEW TOWARD END OF 1975 EXPERIENCE
WITH VISITS TO BE CONDUCTED DURING PERIOD OCTOBER-DECEMBER.
IF THESE VISITS PROCEED SMOOTHLY IT MAY STILL BE POSSIBLE TO
SECURE EXTENSION, ALTHOUGH ODDS LOOK UNFAVORABLE.
STEARNS

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